
Appendix II

Partisan Assessments of Information Concerning Genetically Modified Foods: Preliminary Results

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The hostile-media perception—the tendency for partisans on an issue to judge mass media coverage of that issue as hostile to their own point of view—has been vividly demonstrated, but not well explained. This is a particularly intriguing and important question because this perceptual bias seems to contradict a robust literature on assimilation biases: the tendency to find information more supportive, rather than more opposed, to one's own position.

We attempted to verify this bias as a media effect and reconcile it with assimilation biases by presenting identical information in both a mass-media and a student-essay context, something no research has previously attempted. (We also tested several processing explanations, but those tests are not included in these results.)

Attendees at *High Anxiety and Biotechnology: Who's Buying, Who's Not, and Why?* and attendees at an annual meeting of an organic food cooperative were invited to take part in a survey. Responses of those who indicated that they held a strongly partisan position—either as GM-food proponents (some of the participants at NABC meeting) or as GM-food opponents (at the organic food cooperative meeting)—were selected for analysis (N=153).

Participants were randomly assigned to read identical information presented as either a news article or a college student's essay. They answered a questionnaire about their perceptions of bias in the article/essay: whether the article/essay was

- biased in its portrayal of GM foods,
- biased in portrayals of supporters or opponents of GM foods,
- biased in the percentage of favorable vs. unfavorable content,

and whether the author was personally biased.

We found that partisans on opposing sides of the issue generally saw the same information as disagreeably biased in a news-story format, but as neutral or even favorably biased in the student-essay format. In addition, there was suggestive evidence that the media aspect of the hostile-media perception can be explained by the perceived reach of the information source.

The data will be published in full elsewhere.